DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 073 863 RC 006 810

AUTHOR Edington, Everett D.; Stans, Patricia
TITLE Small Schools Can Be Better Schools by Building on Their Strengths.
PUB DATE 28 Mar 73
NOTE 16p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools (78th, Chicago, Ill., March 25-28, 1973)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS *Community Attitudes; Curriculum; *Economic Factors; *Educational Innovation; Guidance Services; Inservice Education; *Rural Schools; Shared Services; *Small Schools; Student Teacher Ratio; Technology; Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

The major thesis of this paper is that it is necessary for those people concerned with rural education and small schools to accept 3 challenges--to take full advantage of available rural opportunities, to realize limitations of rural life, and to be aware of responsibilities not only to Rural America but also to an America where there are no divisions between rural and urban communities. Information on small schools was presented in the areas of finances, curriculum, provision of shared services, improvement of teacher quality and performance, improvement in the use of technology, and provision of guidance services in rural schools. It was concluded that some of the major advantages of small schools were the close ties which exist between the student and his home community and the opportunities which exist for more individualized instruction. (PS)

ED 073863

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION
THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

SMALL SCHOOLS CAN BE BETTER SCHOOLS BY BUILDING ON THEIR STRENGTHS

By

Everett D. Edington
Director, ERIC/CRESS

and

Patricia Stans
Research Associate, ERIC/CRESS

Paper Presented at the 78th Annual Meeting of the
North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools
Held at the Palmer House in Chicago
March 25-28, 1973

RC006810

SMALL SCHOOLS CAN BE BETTER SCHOOLS BY BUILDING ON THEIR STRENGTHS

One of the real problems concerning the small rural school today is the fact that a great many important decisions which relate to the future are based not upon fact and knowledge but on opinion and emotion. This is true both for those persons in favor of the small schools and also for those who are opposed to their existance and want to enlarge them into larger units. There is little doubt that a number of small schools in the United States today should not continue to exist in their present form. Their students would get much better educational programs if they were consolidated or merged into larger units. On the other hand, I believe that a great many students may have been severely handicapped by losing some of the advantages of the smallness and closeness of therural school when moved into a larger unit. There is also the problem of isolation. Large numbers of schools cannot consolidate or merge with other school districts because of the distances involved and the terrain in the areas in which they are located. The main thesis of this presentation will be to show how the strengths of these rural schools can be identified, and how to take advantage of these identified strengths in order to build better schools for our youngsters in rural areas.

Let us first look briefly at some of the characteristics of Rural America and its schools. Most of the research does not paint a happy picture for education of children in rural areas. Freida Gehlen (10), in her presentation at the National Working Conference on Solving Education Problems in Sparsely Populated Areas, in Denver, 1069, painted a bleak picture for a great many rural schools. She classified them as having a limited curriculum, conservative tax picture, conservative faculty and staff, and a student population homogeneous in background and values. She

indicated that controversial areas in which conflict would be likely to arise are usually either eliminated or not faced squarely. Gehlen did indicate, however, that change could come as a result of the will of the small rural community to improve educational opportunities.

Edward Breathitt (3), in his presentation at the National Outlook Conference on Rural Youth, 1967, painted a similar bleak picture. He indicated that the youth of Rural America are not afforded an equal educational opportunity. The disadvantages are general in nature and are not confined to any single area of the country, but are widespread enough so that they constitute a national problem. He indicated that probably the greatest need would be to change the migration stream from Rural to Urban America. There is some indication that these streams of migration have leveled off. Some persons even feel that the migration has reversed and we are seeing more people going to rural areas. This may be true of the suburban areas surrounding the cities, but is not necessarily true of the isolated rural communities.

Nels Ackerson (1), also at the National Outlook Conference on Rural Youth, 1967, indicated that the rural youth are confronted with a serious paradox of opportunities and frustrations. Opportunities are plentiful for those who possess skills and abilities necessary for competing in our technologically advanced society but limited for those who are unable to compete in our society in either job competition or in social processes. He felt it was necessary to accept three challenges, (1) to take full advantage of available rural opportunities, (2) to realize limitations of rural life, recognizing that opportunities exist elsewhere, and (3) to be aware of our responsibilities not only to Rural American but also a responsibility to an America where there are no divisions between rural and urban communities.

The text of my paper will follow these three points. Probably the first thing we can do is bemoan the fact that we have disadvantages in Rural America. What we need to do is to recognize the advantages and opportunities, and capitalize on these in our educational programs.

William Clement's report, Ideal High School Size, a Mirage in the Desert (5), points out a number of advantages of the small school. These are as follows:

1. Better pupil-teacher ratios,
2. Varied assignments for the high school teachers which aid them in not becoming too specialized in broader inner concepts
3. Individualized quidance and counseling. He here stresses the fact that in smaller schools, the administrators and teachers have a much better opportunity to know the child and to provide better guidance, and
4. Working conditions of teachers are usually more acceptable in smaller schools and rural communities. These conditions also provide a more wholesome atmosphere for students.

Many of the things which he points out have not necessarily been proven but are widely advocated by those persons favoring the small schools.

Paul Ford (8), in his study of remote high schools in the north-western part of the United States, found that a large number of daily preparations did not seem to trouble teachers in small high schools. The teachers from both large and small schools acquired a great deal of job satisfaction from the personal relationships with students, and teachers in the small schools are considerably more involved with student activities than teachers in large high schools. This helps give the closer contact of the teachers with their students. He also found that students from smaller high schools

tend to participate in more high school activities, particularly student government and athletics, than did their peers in large high schools. The variety of such activities was quite limited in the small high schools and the students in these schools did not believe these activities to be as important to their future life as did their peers from the larger schools. He also reported the lack of cultural type activities for the rural school student. Ford also found that in the Northwest the teachers from the larger schools used more innovations that those from the small schools.

A great many of these types of disadvantages can be overcome, however, with proper planning. He also stated that it appeared that neither administrators nor teachers in small high schools have availed themselves of the educational potential offered by the very small classes or the frequent student-teacher contact. Activities could be planned that would take the students away from their small rural area into larger urban settings. This could be done not only during the school year, but also during the summer time activities. An excellent example of this type of summer program is the one developed in Cochise County, Arizona, in which students travel to a large Army base in the area to obtain various skills. This travel to a different environment also provides the opportunity to obtain needed social skills.

The major conclusion of Ford's report was that the small remote high school does not take advantage of its small size. Frequent contacts among teachers, students, and parents are not utilized to offer imaginative programs for the education of rural youth. Rather than taking advantage of the potential that exists, small high schools appear to be imitating traditional patterns of program organization and staff utilization. Some of Ford's major recommendations for those schools which were remote and

necessary were as follows:

1. The Division of Curriculum Instruction of the State Department of Public Instruction should be responsible for planning and development. This responsibility would include developing appropriate types of curriculum activities for the school.
2. An advisory panel made up of teachers and administrators representing the small schools should meet with State Department's instruction personnel and university educators in planning their programs. Each panel should probe deeply into the potential problems of such a school and serve in an advisory capacity as the Division carries forth arrangements to improve education in the small school districts.
3. A series of in-service training sessions and summer institutes for teachers and administrators of the small schools should be conducted by the State Department of Education.
4. The State Department of Education and Universities and Colleges should provide consultants to work with the problems of the rural schools.
5. As soon as possible the State Department should establish at least one demonstration project in the state to illustrate the latest effective practices in curriculum design and staff organization appropriate to remote schools.

FINANCES:

Generally, research has shown that the per-pupil cost in small schools is much higher than in the large schools. As previously pointed out in this paper, however, this may be due to the much lower pupil-teacher ratios than are found in the larger schools. This enables teachers to have much closer contacts with the students. The study done by the Massachusetts State

Board of Education, 1968 (7), did not find the cost difference to be true. In a comparison of regional and small high schools they found that the regional schools cost approximately one hundred dollars per student more to educate than the small rural high schools. The explanation given for this was that the regional schools provided a much more comprehensive program than did the small schools, and provided more opportunities in areas such as vocational education, language laboratories and other more expensive curriculum areas.

The Massachusetts Study was, however, unique in its findings concerning the costs per pupil in the rural versus the larger schools.

CURRICULUM:

Traditionally speaking, the small school is far behind when compared to the larger school in the number and types of programs offered to the students. Some interesting facts come to light, however, when one observes some things that are happening today in our more innovative schools. Many aspects of the open classroom are very little different from those that have existed for many years in the old one-room schools. Students progress at their own rate in a completely ungraded situation, with the teacher working with individual students and the students helping each other. Many courses can be developed which fit better into the flexible scheduling programs possible in small schools.

In Oregon, educators reported the implementation of a program which divided the high school language arts program into sixteen quarter credits needed for graduation (2). The classes were grouped by student ability and interests. They also developed an optional vocational math course as well as laboratory oriented science courses for ninth graders which the students could use in discovering methods in the physical science program.

In the Dilingham High School District, Dilingham City School District,

Alaska, in high school grades 7 through 12, a scheduled curriculum was established which provided students and teachers with an active voice in determining their educational experiences (13). The result was a group of over 200 one-half credit mini-courses offering a variety of time arrangements. All courses were non-graded through the ninth grade level. Junior high level students were given the opportunity to schedule into regular high school level courses. The school year was divided into 60-day tri-mesters and 63 minute time blocks, consisting of 3 twenty-one minute modules. Reaction to the new schedule in curriculum appeared to be thoroughly favorable from students, teachers, and others.

One of the most comprehensive programs in the development of curricula for the rural schools is that carried out by the Northwest Laboratory in Portland, Oregon (14). At the present time, the program has been funded to develop a community approach to the problems of the small rural schools. This will be carried on for a minimum of at least three years, with possible funding for two additional years. The major purpose will be a concerted effort to determine how total community involvement can provide for better educational programs for rural students.

An excellent example of the curriculum innovation is the Art-by-Telephone Program as reported by Michael J. Clarke (4). This program, funded under Title III of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, involved rural high schools in Nevada, Oregon, Idaho and Utah. The program was designed to offer art instruction from a master teacher to students enrolled in high schools with limited resources. Instruction in art was provided by joining a number of widely separated small rural high schools into a conference situation in which all units of the system, including the instructor, were served by common two-way communications amplified telephone service. Each school was

equipped with the telephone amplifier, receiver, and transmitter so that the student in the classroom could hear all conversation and also initiate oral response. The problem with this and other similar types of programs is that as soon as funding is gone, the program is dropped. State Departments of Education need to take greater responsibility for providing such curriculum innovations to the small rural schools within their states.

One of the greatest criticisms of the rural schools in the area of curriculum has been their lack of adequate vocational and occupational training programs for the students. This did not need to be so, as was pointed out by Gordon Swanson (15) in his paper presented at the National Training Institute for Vocational Related Personnel in Rural Areas, in Auburn, Alabama, in 1970. He states that organizational and administrative programs in vocational education in rural areas can be strengthened to better meet the needs of the students. Other examples of programs in rural areas are the Utah Integrated Shop Programs and Mobile Office Education Programs in Southern Utah (12) and The Fort Benton Trades and Industry Curriculum Outlines in Fort Benton, Montana (9). Each of these programs shows that industrial and occupational-type programs can be initiated in rural schools. Rural school administrators can take better advantage of their limited work stations for co-op programs and extend the boundaries of their schools into neighboring cities in order to develop better cooperative programs. In some cases, excellent cooperation has been obtained with large military establishments, thus providing work stations for students in the rural areas. A recent set of guidlines for establishing cooperative programs in small schools is found in Cooperative Vocational Programs in Small Schools, a suggested guide for program planning, which is published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, 1972, in conjunction with the University of Nebraska.

Provision of Shared Services

A major breakthrough in the broadening and more efficient use of educational resources in rural areas is the "shared-service concept," wherein those types of services that smaller districts are unable to afford are provided over a larger area. This requires that each small district needs to assume only a portion of the costs.

Types of shared services vary widely and may include guidance services; special instructional programs; computer services; school health services; and services of consultants, coordinators, and supervisors. Growing very steadily in this area are programs that are transported from one school to another. For example, audiovisual services have been supplied to many small schools on a cooperative basis.

Another type of program that may be shared is the inservice training program for teachers, wherein an intermediate unit, county, service center, or other type of unit may provide inservice programs for teachers in the area. Many states--such as Texas, Nebraska, South Carolina, Michigan, and New York--have made these types of units legal by appropriate legislation. The units are organized in different ways in the various states and may or may not have taxing power.

Improvement of Teacher Quality and Performance

Possibly the most rewarding of all types of practices and techniques for improvement of the small school are those responsive to improvement of teacher quality and performance. Teacher quality may be linked to two factors beyond the immediate control of the school administrator: (1) program deficiencies in the institutions

involved in preparation of teachers and (2) shortcomings in the local socioeconomic environment which preclude the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers. While the first of these problems may be solved by bringing pressure to bear upon the teacher-training institutions, the second may require considerable effort, including financial, to permit small schools to compete for quality teachers. This may tend to take care of itself, however, if the adequate supply of teachers continues.

The most immediate returns, however, can be gained from inservice programs for practicing teachers and administrators. In a great many cases, the first change that must take place relates to pointing out the need for inservice training to the local educators and the lay leadership. In this area, small amounts of resources, if managed wisely, can be quite effective. This may be done at the county level, or even in a larger district, since a number of teachers and administrators may share the individuals or materials providing the inservice training. Some financial assistance from State or Federal levels may be necessary to aid the rural school districts in implementing such programs. The"problem districts" could be identified and then massive programs could be initiated in working with the educational personnel to bring about the necessary improvement.

A good example of an inservice program for improving instructional performance of teachers in rural schools was conducte n 1969 by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (Codwell, 1969)(6). The purpose of the program was to determine the effects of microteaching on the instructional behavior of rural school teachers. As a result of teachers having had the opportunity to observe and analyse their teaching behavior on videotape, there were significant indications of

improvement in instructional skill, teacher attitude, and teacher-pupil interaction.

In some places, the policy-making boards are lay people, while in other areas the boards are composed of representatives of the school districts involved.

A very effective resource that these units have been able to provide is that of information. Many of the units serve as resource centers and have ERIC files as well as other types of materials available for use by students and teachers.

Another concept within the realm of shared services is that of sharing the students. For example, students may travel from one district to another in order to receive certain types of programs. This is reciprocal in that one small district may have one type of program and another district may have another type of program, with students switching districts to attend those schools offering programs to meet the students' needs.

The most extensive developmental program related to rural shared services was conducted by the Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory (Jongeward and Heesacker, 1969)(11). A kit* was developed containing three documents useful in planning shared service activities to improve rural education: Document 13-A identifies 215 shared services in 50 states and provides an index of each service by subject area and by state; 13-B is a series of 10 information sheets on selected shared services containing interesting facts about theservice and identifying sites of exemplary services; and 13-C lists related documents available through ERIC.

USE OF TECHNOLOGY:

One of the real possibilities in improving instruction in the rural schools is that of improving the use of technology. A major program is in the planning stages at this time in which a satelite would be

orbited above the Rocky Mountain states to beam television programs on a number of different channels to schools within this area. A major concern of the project will be that of beaming adequate curriculum education programs to the students in the rural areas in the Rocky Mountain States. Television has long been used in these areas but for those schools that are too remote or too far removed from educational television, this satelite would be a real advantage. Video tape materials, too, could be used more extensively in the rural schools. As I mentioned earlier, the use of amplified telephones now coming into use is a quite inexpensive method to bring a speaker or expert to the classroom by telephone.

GUIDANCE SERVICES IN THE RURAL SCHOOLS:

Guidance services in the rural schools many times do not have a person designated as a full time guidance counselor but can take advantage of the closeness of the teacher to the student, parent, and community and provide an excellent guidance program by utilizing those resources that are available. The guidance services in such a situation are not isolated but an integral part of the classroom activities. Any program of improvement with rural schools must provide an extensive program of in-service education to the teachers. Many of the teachers have roots in the communities, are important members of the communities, and are well respected. State Departments of Education and intermediate units need to develop extensive in-service programs to take advantage of these characteristics of the teachers and to bring them up-to-date in modern technology.

CONCLUSION:

I am in no way advocating that the small rural school is the best

school in all situations. There are still many instances where consolidation would help meet some of the problems. However, in many isolated situations it is impossible for consolidation to take place. Also, in many situations the student would lose contact with his home community and thus break ties which would be very beneficial to him. There are certain characteristics of the small school that can be taken advantage of to provide a more adequate educational program. The most important of these characteristics is the smallness itself, which can provide for more individualized instruction. The closeness that the student, teacher, parent, and community share also aids in developing the student in this setting. Care should be taken, however, not to let emotions get in the way of better educational programs, and when we can provide a better educational program, this should be done in both the large consolidated school and the small isolated school.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

(1) Ackerson, Nels J. "Rural Youth in a Changing World." October 1967, 6pp. ED 016 549.

(2) Blaser, John W. The Corbett Report on Non-Graded Language Arts, Functional Mathematics Option, and Introductory Physical Science. Corbett High School, Oregon, January 1970, 43pp. ED 041 645.

(3) Breathitt, Edward T. "The Status of Rural America." October 1967, 6pp. ED 015 075.

(4) Clark, Michael J.; Blaine W. Allan; David N. Anderson. Art-by-Telephone: Design and Evaluation. Clark County School District, Las Vegas, Nevada, 1970, 31pp. ED 044 222.

(5) Clements, William H. "Ideal High School Size: A Mirage in the Desert." 1970, 24pp. ED 055 689.

(6) Codwell, John E. A Demonstration of the Effect of an Adaptation of Microteaching on the Instructional Behavior of Rural School Teachers. Final Report. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Atlanta, Georgia, October 1969, 78pp. ED 034 620.

(7) Data Comparisons of Regional and Small High Schools. Massachusetts State Board of Education, Division of Research and Development, Woburn, Massachusetts, January 1968, 3pp. ED 052 879.

(8) Ford, Paul; Herbert Hite; Norman Koch. Remote Highschools--The Realities. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, April 1967, 73pp. ED 012 208.

(9) Fort Benton Trades & Industry Curriculum Outline. Fort Benton Public Schools, Montana, 1971, 66pp. ED 062 030.

(10) Gehlen, Frieda L. The Political Aspects of Small Town and Rural Schools. Paper presented at National Working Conference on Solving Educational Problems in Saprsely Populated Areas, Denver, Colorado, March 17-19, 1969, New Mexico State University, University Park. ERIC Clearinghouse on Rural Education and Small Schools, May 1969, 42pp. ED 030 502.

(11) Jongeward, Ray; Frank Heesacker. Sharing Educational Services. PREP-XIII. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, 1969, 89pp. ED 036 666.

(12) Loveless, Austin G. Utah Integrated Shop Program. Final Report. Utah Research Coordinating Unit for Vocational and Technical Education, Salt Lake City, Utah, July 1971, 27pp. ED 056 793.

(13) The Nongraded-Trimester-Minicourse Concept: Report to Date. Dillingham City School District, Alaska, May 1971, 51pp. ED 050 863.

(14) Purpose and Potentials, Part One: Basic Program Plans. Annual Report to the United States Office of Education. Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, Portland, Oregon, September 1968, 194pp. ED 050 854.

(15) Swanson, Gordon. Organization and Administration of Vocational Education For Rural Areas. Paper presented at National Training Institute for Vocational and Related Personnel, Auburn, Alabama, April 7, 1970. National Center for Occupational Education, Raleigh, North Carolina, April 1970, 13pp. ED 040 801.